

INDEXA



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*** Important Changes Taking Place at INDEXA— See Page 5, Inside ***

Djibouti At the Solar Sunspot Minimum—J20MM and J20RR

By Sylvano Borsa (I2YSB) and Alfeo Caputo (I1HJT)

There are diseases which require medicine to be cured, and sometimes the patient gets accustomed to it. In other words, the disease is never cured definitively, but we choose to not renounce it so that we can continue to get the medicine. The DXer is the same—once he feels the sensations of being on the “other side”, which means to be on the DXpedition side, he can no longer renounce the “DX illness”, and can only get relief by injecting a robust amount of “pile-up” in his veins.

That is why, while still on the aircraft flying back home from Somalia a year ago, we started a discussion about where to go to seek the next “pile up exhilaration”. Of course, the reference point was the “most wanted” list, so we started the selection by scrolling it from top to bottom.

Some top ranked entities are immediately rejected—too few solar spots do not encourage such efforts. We exhaust many other possibilities because of unknown or unstable political environments.

Rwanda (9X), one of our dreams, was rapidly dissipated by the quick and hopeless replies from the local authorities. Even Eritrea, E3, would have been a good target; Alfeo had already gone to Asmara and, until a short time ago had found that getting a license to operate was not an is-



Posing in the very hot Djibouti sunshine for a team photo are: (front row) Vinicio (IK2CIO), Angelo (IK2CKR), Marcello (IK2DIA) and (back row) Sylvano (I2YSB), Stefano (IK2HKT), Alfeo (I1HJT), and Carlo (IK1AOD).

sue. Unfortunately, due to changing political events, Eritrean officials would not at this time allow the issuance of an amateur radio license.

Time was passing fast and we began to sense the pressure. We turned our compass East and focused on Bangladesh (S2) as a possible target, even if the low solar ac-

tivity was unfavourable. We immediately received a fast and positive reply from the local authorities but that response came at the same time as news appearing on the 425DX website that a Spanish team had already planned activity from S2. We were astonished, three down for three tries at the end of August!

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Djibouti At the Solar Sunspot Minimum—J20MM and J20RR (con'd)

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We again initiated a search on the Internet and Djibouti appeared, with Moucha Island, AF 053, being a prime candidate for our base of operations. The country was well down in the world-wide "wanted" list, being ranked 92 and AF 053 confirmed by many IOTA island chasers. Yet, the island status and the low band ranking in many parts of the world made Djibouti a good choice at this point in the solar cycle.

Alfeo set about to find contacts that could assist us. At the time Eric, J20SAT, a Belgian fellow in Djibouti for business, and Jean Claude, J28JA, a resident Frenchman, were active from Djibouti and they both were very supportive of our plans. After finding the the right channel to the Communication Ministry, we finally got the green light. Ready to proceed, we immediately opened a World Wide Web page, and forwarded our official announcement to various DX newsletters.

Several days later, a Bosnian radio ham working and residing in Djibouti left a note on our website. He provided us much information on Djibouti, including pictures he took on Moucha Island. We found this material to be very helpful in planning our operation!

Pictures showed Moucha Island to be flat, with rare and low vegetation and, luckily, there was a resort with some bungalows on the island. Unfortunately, Google Earth maps are only done in low resolution for the island so we didn't get help that way. We finally found a local tourist operator who provided us all the necessary details. The operator told us to not expect a night life on Moucha as in Rimini (a famous Italian summer holiday resort area), and we think he was surprised when we told him the sight would be perfect! When we received a commitment from the resort that electrical power would be available around the clock, the last

barrier was overcome.

There was no reason to change a winning team; therefore all the operators engaged in the previous DX expedition in Somalia—Silvano (I2YSB), Alfeo (I1HJT), Carlo (IK1AOD), Angelo (IK2CKR), Marcello (IK2DIA) and Vinicio (IK2CIO)—were ready to start again. Only Carlo, (IK1HJS), who was at that time tentatively engaged in another important DXpedition could not join us. A new member, Stefano (IK2HKT), stepped up. He was new to DXpeditioning but had much experience in contesting, being one of the very successful IH9P contest team.

Silvano, as logistics leader, began to wrestle with the problem of how to get 400 kg of equipment to our chosen location. His experience from previous DXpeditions served him well, and everything was ready by departure date.

Our departure meeting was set for January 31st at 5:30 AM in Mortara, close to Milano. As has been the case in recent DXpeditions we've launched, fog in all of Northern Italy that morning gave us a few tense moments, but we arrived in Paris in time to board our waiting plane for Djibouti.

As soon as our feet touched Djiboutian soil, we immediately realized that the down payment we sent to the local tourist operator was a good investment—they were waiting almost under the aircraft, ready to drive us to our island destination. Yet, we still had the critical task of clearing customs ahead of us. A lot of boxes and tubes always stirs interest, demands inspection, and sometimes results in duties being paid. Nothing like that happened in our case; our travel operator took care of all the details and no formalities were necessary. In just a matter of minutes our equipment and we are ready to go to the harbor where a fast motor boat waited to take us to Moucha

Island.

Alfeo and Vinicio remained behind to go to the Communication Ministry to get the radio amateur licenses. Everything was ready and waiting for us as anticipated from advance emails. We had asked in advance for the callsigns J20M and J20R but due to a misunderstanding we found they cannot issue any call sign with a single letter suffix. We were issued instead the callsigns J20MM and J20RR and were on our way. We immediately forwarded the news to our pilot station and to some friends in Italy that we would be on the air soon but that we would have different callsigns.

To reach Moucha island we must sail for 10 miles—about 30 minutes on a fast boat. On the way to Moucha, we passed Maskali Island, in the same IOTA group, which is not fully accessible because it houses a military installation. From the boat, our "home to be" looked exactly as we imagined it, thanks to the pictures and information we acquired prior to our departure. Ahead of us were a dozen nice brick-bungalows sitting on the shore of the sea on the Northern part of the island with a great takeoff to the populated parts of the world. Unfortunately we see no trees, just shrubs and, in the resort area, some ornamental greens and a

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couple of palm trees, imported from the mainland. On the southern part of the island there are some mangroves as well.

The first job, once we are on the island, is to install the SSB station. Antennas are a 2-element SteppIR suitable for 6 to 20 meters, a vertical for 30, 40 and 80 meters, and a 200-meter long Beverage oriented towards the north. In the afternoon we are ready, and the operation from Moucha Island begins.

The second SSB station is ready before the sunset. It is a low power station, using a barefoot transceiver and a vertical antenna built by I1UJX, which covers 7 bands from 10 to 40 meters and weighs only 3.5 kilograms!

We had no activity on the air during the first night. We were exhausted from the trip and the construction tasks during the day. The following morning just after sunrise and a sweet rest, with ears plugged because of a "noisy background" coming from some of the SSB operators, we started installation of the CW station. Antennas consist of a five band Spiderbeam, a vertical quarter wavelength on 30 meters and 40 meters, built by Silvano, and a Battle Creek Special for 80/160 meters. This last antenna was successfully used by us in Somalia last year, but our current version is lighter and stronger thanks to some high strength aluminium tubing which Piero, W1NA, helped us procure in the USA. The result is a very light 15-meter tall antenna, flexible as a fishing pole.

To avoid surprises on site, all antennas were assembled and tested in Italy. When reassembled on Moucha Island, we were not able to find any



A hot Djibouti sun, an azure sky, a constant breeze, and an aqua colored sea framed the Battle Creek Special each day of the operation.

resonance or a decent SWR on our MFJ antenna analyzer. We ran through all the hypotheses of what might be causing our problem—with no results. We dropped and raised the antenna several times under the blazing Djiboutian sun—again no results. At last we find the problem to be with the MFJ. Perhaps some strong broadcasting signal (or military communications?) in the area is making the antenna analyzer crazy once we connect the radials! After some experimentation, we find a workable solution. Our conclusion is that the Mucha Island soil, which is made of fossil shellfish and coral, is such as to badly influence antenna performance.

We encountered amazing, huge pileups on all bands, and the feedback from our pilot station and the spots on the cluster confirm our impression that our signals are strong on all bands. The result is that both big gun and "little pistol" stations upon finding our strong signals on the S meter, are encouraged to QSO with us. From our end, the result was that the S meter was always stuck over S9 and we had considerable difficulty detecting callsigns out

of the noise floor! We are forced to use all the possible tricks—to call by numbers, switching on the attenuators, spreading out the pileup etc.—to catch some callsigns! Furthermore, in many cases the lack of discipline and the lack of attention by callers to our instructions to keep order in the pileups made the situation even worse.

We had no Internet connection on the island, which meant we did not have real time feedback that many DXers now presume all DXpeditions have. We sailed to Djibouti mainland every 3 to 4 days to upload our logs and to download our emails and view the spots from DX Summit. Unfortunately the spot information was not timely enough to be useful.

On the high bands we worked hard to exploit the propagation openings when they appeared. We were able to operate with both the SSB and CW stations on the same band and often, as soon as we realized an opening in progress—and we had some very good ones on 10 meters and 12 meters—we operated both modes at the same time on the same band.

On the low bands we were on the air almost every night with two stations on SSB and CW. We also had an intense activity on 160 meters, sharing the time with the operation on 80 meters CW, looking for Japan and USA during the grayline periods. According to the predictions, we found a high correlation of worse propagation and higher noise on the low bands on those days during which we had good openings on the high bands during the sunlight.

At times on 12 meters and 15 meters the bands were blocked for

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quite a long time, 10 to 20 minutes, by a very strong jamming signal consisting of some high speed pulses at least 50 Khz wide. We surmise it might be from the military installation in the area nearby, and may have been a contributor to the spurious operation of our antenna analyzer.

Our low power station performance was surprising. Operating barefoot with only 100 watts of power and a ultra-light vertical antenna we logged almost 8,000 QSOs—3,500 of them being on 30 meters.

During the day the weather was, in a word, HOT! Temperatures were around 40C° (104F°) daily, but we were blessed with some continual breeze to help us feel comfortable. Not “feeling” hot, we did not realize how strong the sun is close to the equator and failed to avoid sun-burned skin. But, once home all our friends would be envious of our sun-tans. Night time temperatures often fell to 25C° (77F°)—sometimes requiring donning of warmer clothing.

Surprisingly, we did not suffer any mosquitoes—probably because of the breeze. With no mosquitoes on the island, we suspended our malaria prevention treatment.

The sea is calm and clean all the time. As anticipated, “entertainment” consists of swimming and scuba diving. During the week ends some visitors reach the island—tourists come there just for diving, and groups of French or American soldiers come to spend some free hours. On a few occasions some visitors stay on the island overnight just for one or two days.

On one Friday, Jean Claude J28JA along with his wife came to see us. It was a real pleasure to spend the whole day with him! We also had an unexpected visit from Emo, J28AD, an Italian who has been living in Djibouti for 50 years. At 76 years of age, he was an amazing and inde-

fatigable fellow. Emo arrived with General Christian Estripeau, the commander of the French military hospital in Djibouti. He invited us all to his house as guests to a party on Tuesday evening, just before our departure to Paris.

The two weeks pass all too fast, it seems yesterday when we arrived and now it is time to leave. We quickly dismantle all our equipment and sail to mainland Djibouti. We are sure it was the first time that a seven person group stayed for such a long time on the island, and we believe it will not happen again soon. Our relations with the resort personnel was wonderful and now that we are leaving, we feel a little nostalgia. We will miss the solitude and the quietness of the island and the rush of the pileup. We hope our hosts will miss, perhaps, the vivacity of the seven Italians that, for a while, put poles and wires everywhere.

To reach the French General's house for our party, we must enter the French army base. Emo comes to pick us up in Djibouti and gives us the formal invitation to show to the base post guard. After two weeks of Djiboutian food, finding French cheese and wine on the table full of huge quantities and varieties of food provides a contrast in International palates!

The aircraft to Paris is almost empty, providing a good opportunity to occupy more seats to lay and sleep deeply. After a nearly flawless trip we finally encounter a real inconvenience—leaving the Paris airport, one of the main roads across the city is blocked by an auto accident and it takes us more than 5 hours to get out of Paris!

We learned much from this DXpedition, both on the technical and operating fields. It was a great living experience as well, two weeks together without a single disagreement or polemic between us. In the end, we logged more than 48,000 QSOs. It was hard, long work, but we are happy as we are convinced we did our best to put Djibouti in the logs of highest possible number of friends around the world.

A special thank you goes out to our long list of sponsors—INDEXA being one of them— and to all the friends who helped us in this venture. Thanks to their support we were able to conclude our challenge in a very successful fashion.

73 Ciao, Silvano I2YSB , Alfeo I1HJT



The INDEXA banner flies in the breeze of Moucha Island.

An IMPORTANT message about changes at INDEXA . . .

Hello INDEXA DXers,

First, I want to thank so many of you for your write-in votes for me as president. Our thanks go to Ron, ZL1AMO, for his service and contribution to INDEXA over the past few years. He is truly the Pacific DXer of the century!

One new executive officer and two new directors are now with us. John Scott, K8YC, our newsletter editor for the past several years, was elected vice president. John will continue as our newsletter editor so he has two extremely important functions. We also have two new directors, Lynn Lamb, W4NL, and Carl Smith, N4AA. Most of you know Carl Smith, N4AA, as the publisher of QRZ DX and the DX Magazine. Bill, W4UNP, remains our Secretary/Treasurer, and he is into his 24th year in this position.

Active directors still with us are Franz Langner, DJ9ZB, Bob Allphin, K4UEE, and Richard Grant, W9RG. Due to health related issues, Nellie Lazard, XE1CI, felt the need to resign in late October so we will be reviewing candidates to replace her in the near future.

As all of you are aware we are apparently at the bottom of this Sun Spot Cycle. Even under these conditions there have been some great DXpeditions over the past months, but just imagine what is going to be happening during the next few years! Propagation is on the rise thus perfect timing for many DXpeditions.

Remember that INDEXA's goal is to provide financial assistance to DXpeditions that are considered high on the need list. Our budget is used almost exclusively for this purpose. Our goals of adding new members, raising funds and eliminating overhead are ways we can position INDEXA to be pro-active in the financial assistance of future DXpeditions.

This ultimately reflects in your increased DXCC score.

If you are one of our many Life Members, how about including INDEXA on your list for future contributions? Your additional financial support will certainly be used in the future to enhance your favorite sport of chasing DX.

Our officers have been reviewing changes that we feel are necessary for INDEXA to grow, prosper and to be in a better position to assist the "Most-Wanted" DXpeditions.

The following changes, with explanation, are announced for INDEXA:

1. **Effective immediately, the annual dues for e-mail subscribers will be increased to \$20.00.** This is the first increase in dues since 1993.
2. **The paper copy of the quarterly INDEXA newsletter will be eliminated.** The February 2008 newsletter will be the last paper issue, with one exception. The newsletter cost is our largest annual expense. Since our last dues increase in 1993, there have been eight (8) postage increases. Eliminating the expense of printing, paper cost, envelopes and postage would allow this portion of your dues to be reinvested in our DXpedition budget. Those of you who are overseas members will receive the e-mailed newsletter several weeks quicker in most cases.
PAPER SUBSCRIBERS PLEASE READ CAREFULLY NOW Please notify our secretary/treasurer, Bill Jennings at w4unp@comporium.net of your e-mail address. Future INDEXA newsletters need to be delivered via e-mail rather than Postal mail. If a paper copy is absolutely required it can be provided,

but at a extra cost of \$10.00 per year for both annual and existing life members.

3. **Change of INDEXA Mailing address.** Effective immediately, the new mailing address for all written correspondence is being changed to the following: INDEXA, P.O. Box 123, Catawba, SC 29704 USA. As is customary, the U.S. Post Office will forward mail from the old to the new address for 12 months.
4. **Elimination of Life Membership option (effective immediately).** This is a business decision since the current life membership fee is insufficient to provide ongoing financial benefit. Existing Life Memberships will be continued but no new life memberships will be accepted.
5. **Price increase for the INDEXA Rubber Stamp and Lapel Pins from \$5.00 to \$10.00 each (effective immediately).** This is just the cost of doing business.
6. **Elimination of INDEXA "T" shirt sales (effective immediately).** These shirts have tied up a lot of INDEXA cash and sales are historically slow.

WOW, what a way for a new president to start off, but we are all attempting to focus on the most effective ways for INDEXA to assist DXing.

Other enhancements to the organization are under review. We will be in a position to announce these changes in the very near future.

Regards,
Gary Dixon, K4MQG

SEDCO Makes Donation to INDEXA



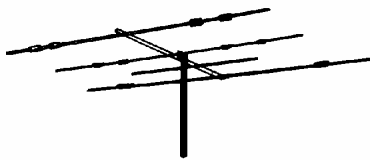
SEDCO organizer, Conference Chairman, and INDEXA Director, Lynn Lamb (W4NL) presents a check to INDEXA President, Gary Dixon at the conclusion of the SEDCO III Conference.

The Southeastern DX and Contesting Organization (SEDCO) recently completed its third annual Conference in Pigeon Forge, TN. This non-profit organization brings together DXers and contesters for a day of presentations and technological exchanges. Proceeds of the event are donated to organizations furthering the cause and quality of ham radio activity. INDEXA was most pleased to receive a donation again in 2007 from SEDCO. SEDCO IV will be on September 28, 2008.

Steve Victor, W7WK—SK

Steve Victor, W7WK, passed away on Sunday, October 7. Steve had been one of the staff members on the INDEXA Daily Information Session until last year when health issues caused him to cease that activity.

Steve is remembered by many who stopped in to the Daily Information Session held each day on 14.236 MHz at 23:30Z.



DX World Guide by Franz Langner, DJ9ZB

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